

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group



“Our mission is to eliminate discrimination and stigma in the field of mental health and to support, educate and assist the public, patients and their families regarding available resources and treatment options which will help lead to their recovery”

To achieve our goals we undertake the following:

- Patient Help line – this is manned Monday-Friday between 8am-8pm and Saturday 8am-5pm.
- Public talks to patients, families and professionals regarding Depression, Anxiety, Suicide and coping skills.
- Referral lists for patients needing help

Two major projects are our schools suicide prevention programme “Suicide Shouldn’t be a Secret” and our rural outreach project “Defeat Depression”. In addition to this we conduct workshops and health days for corporations.

HELPING A DEPRESSED FRIEND OR LOVED ONE

HELP THE SUFFERER OBTAIN APPROPRIATE DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT: Accompany your loved one to a professional psychiatrist or psychologist for diagnosis, referral or treatment. Remember that the most effective treatment is a combination of medication and counselling therapy.

SUPPORT GROUPS: Determine if there are any support groups in your area. Sharing frustrations, difficulties and thoughts with others in a similar position helps.

BE PREPARED: Since depression is a disease, you will need to learn much about the disease, and more about your loved one suffering from the disease. You will be needed to offer care and to create a supportive environment for the sufferer. This involves understanding, patience and attention.

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT: Relationships with family members and friends are a vital part of the sufferer’s regime against depression. Make it a habit to express care and appreciation for family members and loved ones. Feel free to pay compliments and notice the good in loved ones.

INVOLVE THE PERSON IN YOUR LIFE AND ACTIVITIES: Invite your loved one for walks, outings, trips to the movies and other activities you would normally do. Be gently insistent if your invitation is initially declined. Encourage participation in pleasurable activities and hobbies – both new activities and activities that the person enjoyed prior to the onset of depression.

AVOID PRESSURISING THE DEPRESSED PERSON TO CHEER UP: Depressed people are suffering from REAL problems and not merely low moods. Do not expect the depressed person to be able to “snap out” of the condition, nor treat it as a faked illness or sign of laziness.

BE SENSITIVE – LISTEN! Listen to what they are saying. An attentive listener is what most depressed people look for. Be there to listen and comfort, but respect the person’s own needs and abilities. DO NOT exclude the person from family matters or discussions in the belief that it would be less stressful if they are not involved. Treat the person as normally as possible. Listen to the person’s hopes, fears, frustrations and needs. DO NOT TRY TO PROBLEM-SOLVE!

ENCOURAGE: Encouragement is vital – remind the sufferer that seeking treatment is a sign of strength. Remind the sufferer that treatment for this illness is always available and has proven to be very successful. Reassure the depressed person that the condition is only temporary and that they WILL recover in time.

AVOID PATRONISING OR BABYING YOUR LOVED ONE: Appreciate the fact that the depressed person is not at their best and try to help out where you can, where necessary. Be sensitive – you should not seek to do everything for the depressed person – while this may seem to be the best thing to do in the light of the sufferer not being able to do everything for themselves, it is actually beneficial for the person to accept some responsibility as this can improve self esteem.

SUICIDE: If your loved one or friend mentions having thoughts of suicide, take it seriously and seek professional help immediately. If a loved one makes an attempt at suicide, DO NOT try to assign blame – their actions and feelings are symptomatic of the illness.

“FIRST AID” FOR PANIC:

Fourteen “On the Spot” Tips to Get Through a Panic attack

- Take a “time out” and slow down. Slow your rate of breathing, slow your racing thoughts, slow your entire body, head to toe. Then slowly resume your previous activities.
- Picture a relaxing scene using all your senses. Now put yourself into the scene.
- If there are places available, take a stroll. If there are people available, talk to one of them.
- Stroke a dog or cat.
- Picture a person you trust, someone who believes in you, supports you and cares about your well-being. Now imagine the person is with you, offering you encouragement.
- Recall a time you handled a similar situation well, or try to bring to mind a past success and the good feeling you experienced at that time.
- Focus on the present, on concrete objects around you. Make a game of noticing details or inventing questions about every object you identify.
- Count backwards from 20 and with every number picture a different image of love, something that pleases you, something that calms you. These might be images you recall from the past or those you only imagine.
- Occupy your mind with an absorbing task. Plan your schedule for the day or the evening; try to recall the names of all the Clint Eastwood movies you’ve ever seen; plan a sumptuous meal, appetiser through dessert, and imagine yourself eating one bite of every course.
- Bring to mind the image of a person you admire and imagine yourself to actually be that person. Think as they might think, act as they might act, even feel as they might feel.
- Remind yourself that attacks always end. Always.
- Remind yourself that panic is not dangerous. YOU WILL NOT DIE!
- Take a deep yawn and stretch your body, head to toe.
- Get mad. Vow not to let panic win out. You deserve better.
- If all else fails, take as deep a breath as you can and hold it as long as you can. Use one of the other strategies to occupy your mind. Your physical symptoms should come down and stay down.